

E-CHARKHA – A REALITY

Manoj Gupta*

The letter 'e' has assumed special significance in this computer age. 'E-mail', 'e-ticketing', 'e-booking', 'e-filing of return' and the words like that are passé. But 'e-charkha'? One tends to become a bit sceptical about the existence of such a word in the first place, leave alone the product itself. If the Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is to be believed, e-charkha is a reality.

What is an e-charkha ?

The e-charkha has been developed by Shri Hiremath, a Bangalore based engineer, who has been active in the field of non-conventional energy resources. The concept of the e-charaka is not only to produce yarn but also provide a Light for use. It has a maintenance free lead acid battery fixed at the bottom, which functions as an inverter. Spinning the Charkha for about two hours will give back-up power for about 6 –7 hours of basic lighting and playing radio.

In this system, a battery is charged when the Charkha is being used which can store and supply power to light up a small LED based 'home-light'. The battery provides electricity to power a small transistor radio also.

The LED light is the latest and has an extremely long life of at least 35 years. The generator of the e-charkha is also of the latest design in '3' phase version and has virtually the same life of almost 35 years. All components have been chosen after a worldwide search so that the end user has a reliable, foolproof, weather-proof and rugged product, which can be enjoyed for many years.

The cost of the new age Charkha is approximately Rs 3,000. KVIC plans to induct two lakh pieces of e-charkha at Khadi weaving centres across the country.

Charkha, Khadi and Gandhiji

Khadi and charkha are inseparable. As we know, spinning of the thread on charkha precedes the weaving of khadi. The charkha became a weapon towards achieving independence during non-cooperation movement. Gandhiji said, "In my dream, in my sleep, while eating, I think of spinning wheel. The spinning wheel is my sword. To me it is the symbol of India's liberty."

The great saint-visionary Gandhiji had said "I would make the spinning-wheel the foundation on which to build a sound village life. I would make the wheel the centre round which all other activities will revolve." That Charkha was not merely a spinning-wheel for making threads had been made amply clear by Gandhiji, "Take to spinning (to find peace of mind). The music of the wheel will be as balm to your soul. I believe that the yarn we spin is capable of mending the broken warp and woof of our life. The charkha is the symbol of non-violence on which all life, if it is to be real life, must be based." He had also visualised that while charkha was a means of income to the poor, howsoever paltry it might be, it undoubtedly had much greater significance. He said, " The Charkha in the hands of a poor widow brings a paltry price to her, in the hands of Jawaharlal, it is an instrument of India's freedom."

KVIC's Relentless Effort

The Government recently reconstituted the Khadi and Village Industries Commission with Ms. Kumud Joshi as the Chairperson.

KVIC has been working relentlessly to promote khadi and charkha since its inception. It has taken a number of steps to modernise charkha and other implements.

The Government in consultation with KVIC has formulated a scheme for enhancing productivity and competitiveness of khadi industry and artisans by overhauling, repairing and renewal of spinning/weaving and allied equipment, replacement of obsolete equipment in operation with 200 of the best performing khadi institutions registered with KVIC, setting up service centres, product and design development, capacity building of artisans as well as khadi institutions. This scheme has the principal objective of upgradation of quality of khadi products for domestic market as well as external market.

The scheme is proposed to be implemented over a period of five years and after the complete implementation of the scheme, around 24,000 new employment opportunities are expected to be added.

KVIC has also launched 'Mission Khadi' to convert the khadi fabric into ready-made garments of latest designs and the help of National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Chennai (Tamilnadu) and NIFT, Kolkata (West Bengal) is being taken for identification and procurement of appropriate machinery for projects under 'Mission Khadi', recommendation of expert designers required for the units, training of people engaged in such projects, etc.

E-Charkha To Boost Village Income

The concept of e-charkha stems from the urge to provide both income and electricity to the poorest masses in remote villages.

The basic idea of the e-charkha is not only to produce yarn but also to generate electricity and employment. Isn't that fascinating? With e-charkha in place, spinning charkha will never be the same again. Spin charkha at night. If the electricity goes off, no problem. What is more, you can enjoy your favourite FM programme while spinning!



****Dy. Director (M&C), PIB, Delhi***